

The Bone Lantern

ABOUT



EARLY WOMEN WRITERS OF FAIRY TALES

I wrote recently about women fairy tale illustrators, so now it's time for some writers. The writers I have listed here are pre-Golden Age, and mostly wrote in France during the 1600s. I'll write at a later date on Golden Age and contemporary writers, but there are already plenty of writers I'm brushing over here. French writers appear heavily in the canon, as fairy tales were very much in vogue in 17th Century France.

Marie-Catherine Le Jumel de Barneville, Baroness d'Aulnoy (1650/1651–4 January 1705), AKA the more easily



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works were of a style that we define as the classical fairy tale – whimsical and tied up neatly at the end with a marriage or proper morals. They were also very French (oddly enough), and very linked to her aristocratic background, with titles like *The Bee and the Orange Tree*, *Princess Belle-Étoile* and *The White Doe*. She held a salon in Paris, and was linked to a good numbers of rumours and scandals involving adultery, treason and espionage. I like her very much.



Charlotte-Rose de Caumont de La Force (1654–1724) seems to be the just the kind of woman you want at your party. No stranger to scandals (do you see a pattern forming here?), she was a maid of honour at the court of Louis XIV, until he banished her to a convent for writing 'satirical verses' and being embroiled in various mischiefs and a rumoured affair. It is here that she wrote many *contes de fées*, including her most famous story 'Persinette', based on an older Neapolitan story, and later rewritten as 'Rapunzel' by the Brothers Grimm.



Author Kate Forsyth's wonderful book **Bitter Greens** is based on the time Charlotte-Rose spent in the convent. It's a brilliant read. Kate has also written about **Charlotte-Rose** on her [blog](#).

Henriette-Julie de Murat (1670–1716), not pictured. More controversy! What a surprise! In addition to fairy tales, Henriette wrote some scandalous **faux memoirs**, which had her exiled to the French provincial town of **Loches** for several years. She also wrote in France in the late 17th Century, and some of the fairy tales attributed to her are *Bearskin* and *Starlight*.



Marie-Jeanne L'Héritier de Villandon (1664–1734) was a refreshingly scandal free writer of fairy tales, and niece of the more famous fairy tale writer **Charles Perrault**, though she published her first tale a year before he did. She was a protégé of **Madeleine de Scudéry**, and inherited Madeleine's salon after her death.

Like the three aforementioned writers, she was instrumental in the enormous popularity of fairy tales in 17th Century France.

Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont (1711–1780) wrote the best known version of Beauty and the Beast, though the earliest known version was written by fellow French writer Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve. Marie's childhood was beset by poverty and the death of her mother at the age of 11, though she claims not to have mourned her. Those looking for more scandal will find it this time in her first husband. He spent her large dowry on his debts, then bought a hotel with the rest. He used the hotel as one would expect of an unwelcome patron, by throwing wild parties and inviting all sorts of disreputable characters. Consequently he contracted a disease typical of such a lifestyle, and Jeanne-Marie was able to obtain an annulment. Not long after, she moved to London, where she wrote her many fairy tales, remarried and had a large family. Her works were very moralistic, more so than many of her scandalous French counterparts, and she also wrote schoolbooks and other moral stories and poems.

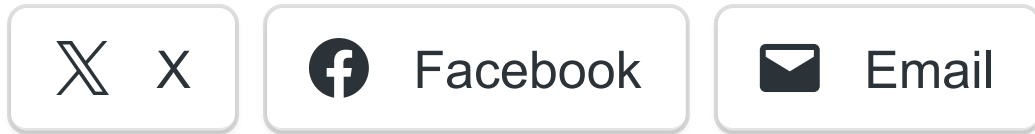


While not technically a known fairy tale writer, it would be remiss of me not to mention **Dortchen Wild**. She was a neighbour of the Grimm brothers in Cassel, Germany in the early 19th Century. They met in 1805, when she was 12. Napoleon invaded Cassel in 1806, and this is the same year that the brothers began collecting fairy tales. Dortchen struck up a friendship with the brothers, much to the disapproval of her autocratic father. They met in secret, and Dortchen told the brothers many of the fairy tales included in their collection. Dortchen had several siblings, but all eventually moved away, leaving her to care for her ailing parents. She and Wilhem Grimm had fallen in love, but could not marry, even after her father's death. The brothers were destitute, and it was only many years later, after the overthrow of Napoleon, and the eventual success of the Grimms' stories, that they were finally able to marry. Dortchen and the Grimm brothers lived together for the rest of their lives.



Kate Forsyth has also written about the life of Dortchen Wild in **The Wild Girl**, in fact it is she who introduced me to her. Read more about Kate's exploration of Dortchen's life [here](#).

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